



*Caring is our Calling!*  
Compassionate. Committed.

**Happy Holidays!**  
*A message from the CEO*



As we approach the end of another year, I like to reflect and express thanks for our hospital, our community, and the tireless service of the staff here at Ringgold County Hospital. You may have noticed that we have a new theme for many of our communications: Caring is our Calling. I think this speaks to the qualities found in the members of the RCH staff.

Here at Ringgold County Hospital, we're dedicated to providing the best possible care to our friends, our neighbors, and our loved ones every day. Whether you're visiting the Mount Ayr Medical Clinic for a well-baby checkup, or visiting an aging parent after surgery, I'm confident you'll find the same level of commitment and compassion.

This year, I celebrated 30 years as the CEO of this institution. I couldn't be more pleased and proud of what we've accomplished over three decades. I'm looking forward to 2018. Happy Holidays and Happy New Year!

—Gordon Winkler



**Carrying on a family legacy**

Dr. Michael Webb is doing his part to contribute to the quality of life for the residents of Southwest Iowa. An audiologist, he's carrying on the family business that his father started in 1978. "I went to work with my father often while I was growing up," he explained. "I saw what he did on a regular basis and saw how people's hearing affects their lives. I knew it's what I wanted to do. It's where I can help."

The plan had been for Dr. Webb to take over Audiological Services, Inc. (ASI) from his father after they practiced together for several years. But when his father passed away suddenly in 2011, the timeline was accelerated. He received his doctorate in audiology from San Diego State in 2014.

Dr. Webb explained that the vast majority of his patients are seniors. As people lose their hearing, they tend to become less social and less active in general. His goal is to keep people active and engaged in their communities. "People are staying more involved as they age," he said. "They want to be with their grandchildren, and be a part of their lives."

Along with a generation determined to stay active, technology has made significant advances in hearing aids for them. "We see a lot of connectivity to other devices now. iPhones, Bluetooth devices, smart phones, for example. Hearing aids are fully digital, with lots of improvements in sound quality and background noise controls. Some are so small, they're almost invisible!"

"Workplaces are doing a better job with hearing protection," says Dr. Webb. "But hunters and farmers need to protect themselves while using guns and loud tractors, too." He recommends parents being aware of their children who always seem to have headphones in their ears.

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*Dr. Michael Webb*

**RINGGOLD COUNTY HOSPITAL**

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“If you can hear the music they’re listening to, it’s too loud.”

Dr. Webb recommends a hearing screening around age 50 or 55. “To set a baseline.” Unfortunately, he says that most people wait for five or 10 years until they seek treatment. In that time, the brain becomes lazy. “If you’re not using it, you can lose the auditory part of the brain. So, it continues to affect what they’re able to hear,” he said. Because it gets worse slowly over time, it can be very hard for the patient to notice, when it may be so apparent to others.

Along with contributing to a less active, less social life, hearing loss has been linked to Alzheimer’s disease and dementia. It contributes to memory issues, can affect overall balance, and leads to a higher incidence of diabetes. It’s also linked to depression. “I want to help people stay connected,” says Dr. Webb. “Eyes connect you to objects. Ears connect you to people.”

If you or a loved one is ready for a hearing screening, Dr. Webb is at Ringgold County Hospital on the first and third Tuesday of each month from 1:00-5:00 pm. Call 641-435-1288 for an appointment.

## The signs and symptoms of hearing loss

Hearing loss that occurs gradually as you age (presbycusis) is common. About 25 percent of people in the United States between the ages of 55 and 64 have some degree of hearing loss. For those older than 65, the number of people with some hearing loss is almost 1 in 2.

Aging and chronic exposure to loud noises are significant factors that contribute to hearing loss. Other factors, such as excessive earwax, can temporarily prevent your ears from conducting sounds as well as they should.

You can’t reverse most types of hearing loss. However, you don’t have to live in a world of muted, less distinct sounds. You and your doctor or a hearing specialist can take steps to improve what you hear.

### Signs and symptoms of hearing loss may include:

- Muffling of speech and other sounds
- Difficulty understanding words, especially against background noise or in a crowd of people
- Trouble hearing consonants
- Frequently asking others to speak more slowly, clearly and loudly
- Needing to turn up the volume of the television or radio
- Withdrawal from conversations
- Avoidance of some social settings

### Factors that may damage or lead to loss of the hairs and nerve cells in your inner ear include:

- *Aging.* Degeneration of delicate inner ear structures occurs over time.
- *Loud noise.* Exposure to loud sounds can damage the cells of your inner ear. Damage can occur with long-term exposure to loud noises, or from a short blast of noise, such as from a gunshot.
- *Heredity.* Your genetic makeup may make you more susceptible to ear damage from sound or deterioration from aging.
- *Occupational noises.* Jobs where loud noise is a regular part of the working environment, such as farming, construction or factory work, can lead to damage inside your ear.
- *Recreational noises.* Exposure to explosive noises, such as from firearms and jet engines, can cause immediate, permanent hearing loss. Other recreational activities with dangerously high noise levels include snowmobiling, motorcycling or listening to loud music.
- *Some medications.* Drugs, such as the antibiotic gentamicin and certain chemotherapy drugs, can damage the inner ear. Temporary effects on your hearing — ringing in the ear (tinnitus) or hearing loss — can occur if you take very high doses of aspirin, other pain relievers, antimalarial drugs or loop diuretics.
- *Some illnesses.* Diseases or illnesses that result in high fever, such as meningitis, may damage the cochlea.

Source: The Mayo Clinic